

Press Release



February 26, 2015
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GPA 03-15

U.S. SECRET SERVICE DISRUPTS SEATTLE AREA FRAUD RING Ten charged with identity theft, fraud

(**Seattle, WA**) – Following a 20 month investigation by the United States Secret Service into an organized fraud ring operating in the Seattle, WA area, ten individuals have been indicted. To date, eight of the defendants listed in the indictment have been arrested.

“The indictment and subsequent arrests of this organized fraud ring are yet another example of how the Secret Service continues to successfully combat identity theft and financial fraud,” said Robert L. Kierstead, Special Agent in Charge of the United States Secret Service Seattle Field Office. “Our success in this case and similar investigations demonstrates our dedication to protecting our country’s financial infrastructure and lessening the significant impact these types of crimes have on our community. This case demonstrates there is no such thing as anonymity for those engaging in identity theft and fraudulent schemes.”

Among those indicted is Clayton Leon Bias, Jr., 25, of Kent, Washington. Bias is charged with aggravated identity theft and bank fraud violations. As set out in court filings, it is alleged Bias and others utilized approximately 219 financial accounts to deposit counterfeit and unauthorized checks that were obtained during burglaries and thefts from autos. Once the checks were deposited into various financial institutions, Bias allegedly obtained the monies through local ATM withdrawals and debit card purchases. The victim banks, all of which are federally insured financial institutions, include: Bank of America, Sound Credit Union, Key Bank and Banner Bank.

The defendants in this case allegedly were able to access the subject accounts utilizing the true account holder’s debit card information and unique PIN. As part of the fraudulent scheme, some of the individuals whose bank accounts were inflated were complicit in the fraud, allowing Bias and others to use their debit cards. Complicit account holders willingly provided their banking information as well as their personal identifying information. As a result of this sophisticated scheme, the defendants are allegedly responsible for nearly \$1 million in losses to various financial institutions.

In addition to Bias, nine other individuals have been charged: Arthur Napoleand Wilcher, 29, of Tacoma, Washington, Calvin Dewayne Davis, 26, of Federal Way, Washington, Okila Ayanna Malayka Ulmer, 31, of Renton, Washington, Amanda Rae Riffle, 28, of Tacoma, Washington, Relonna Dollinn Ward, 34, of Tacoma, Washington, Avery Edward Lee, 32, of Milton, Washington, Johnathan Marquiel Turner, 22, of Federal Way, Washington, Shawn

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Andre Turner, 24, of Kent, Washington and Sephora Quilyn Watkins, 27, of Tacoma, Washington.

This case is being investigated by the Secret Service's Seattle Field Office and the Pierce County Sheriff's Office. During the execution of arrest warrants, the Secret Service received valuable assistance from DHS HSI, the Seattle Police Department, Pierce County Sheriff's Office, Federal Way Police Department and Auburn Police Department.

The U.S. Secret Service has taken a lead role in mitigating the threat of financial crimes since the agency's inception in 1865. As technology has evolved, the scope of the U.S. Secret Service's mission has expanded from its original counterfeit currency investigations to also include emerging financial, electronic and cyber-crimes. As a component agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Secret Service has established successful partnerships in both the law enforcement and business communities – across the country and around the world – in order to effectively combat financial crimes.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For questions concerning this release, please contact the U.S. Secret Service Office of Government and Public Affairs at 202-406-5708.